

The Introduction of
Printing Into Italy

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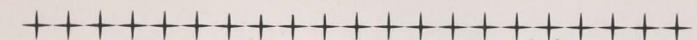
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The Introduction of
Printing Into Italy

BY
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The Introduction of Printing Into Italy



ALWAYS it has been considered an established fact that printing was introduced into Italy in 1465, when Conrad Sweynheym and Arnold Pannartz set up their press in the monastery at Subiaco, near Rome. There have recently come to light some fragments of early Italian printing which throw some doubt on the authenticity of the claim of this partnership to have first practiced the art of typography on Italian soil.

Dr. Konrad Haebler has recently studied with great care the fragments referred to, which are now in the possession of the distinguished New Orleans collector, Edward A. Parsons, having been acquired by him at my suggestion. They constitute one of the most important monuments of early typography in American hands. The fragments consist of six leaves and a stippled engraving, with remnants of other leaves on which apparently illustrations had also appeared, of a small booklet on the "Sufferings of Christ" ("Leiden Christi"). Dr. Haebler is known as one of the world's greatest authorities on incunabula, and for this reason his opinions carry a great deal of weight. As the subject is one of much interest, I

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shall attempt to summarize the results of his study of these fragments, and will reproduce herewith several of the pages.

The character of the type used is of particular interest, for it shows traces of the Gutenberg system of using special types for some letters when appearing in juxtaposition with certain other letters, in order to secure the maximum closeness of fitting and preserve an even color on the page. This system, with the exception of the *Turrecremata* printed at Rome by Ulrich Han in 1467, was used only in the earliest of the Mainz printing.

The type is exceedingly large for the page size and is a gothic, leaning quite largely to the rounded form, and lighter in color than the average missal type. There are fifteen lines to the page, and practically no capital letters, with the exception of the *O* at the beginning of each page. There is a prayer on each page, beginning with an invocation and coming to a close with the word "Amen."

There are in the Staatsbibliothek at Munich unique copies of an edition of the "Seven Joys of Mary" and of the "Sufferings of Christ," bound together, which afford us a key to the text of the publication now under consideration, which appears to be a free translation into Italian of the German edition of the latter text. Furthermore, the one fully preserved print in the Italian edition of the "Sufferings of Christ," showing Christ's trial before Caiaphas, is identical with one of the twenty prints in the Munich edition of the "Sufferings of Christ"—the only complete series of these engravings which has been

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preserved. There is thus a relation of both literary and iconographic character between the German edition and the Italian edition.

By virtue of this relation we find that five leaves at the beginning of this Italian edition have been lost; the first with recto blank and verso bearing the engraving of Christ's entry into Jerusalem; the second bearing on the recto the prayer corresponding to the latter picture, and on the verso the prayer which goes with the Washing of Feet; leaf 3 with the engraving which corresponds to the last-named prayer, and on verso the plate showing the scene at the Mount of Olives; leaf 4, the prayer for the Mount of Olives subject on the recto and that for the Arrest on the verso; the fifth leaf, the engraving of the Arrest on the recto and the Trial before Caiaphas on the verso. This last engraving undoubtedly faced the first preserved leaf, which contains the prayer corresponding to that subject.

The preserved leaves consist of two double leaves which are still connected, and two single leaves not connected with each other nor tipped onto folds. It is considered likely that they were originally connected with the two missing leaves of text at the beginning of the book, making thus a gathering of eight leaves or sixteen pages. The leaves bearing the illustrations appear to have been printed in separate forms, the leaves of which were inserted between the text pages. It is probable that these pictures were also sold separately as a series without text.

Going back now to the Munich copy of the "Sufferings of Christ," we find that it was printed in a type

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O serpente figurato in lo-
doato per moyses o fóta
na soz cte plca dc gracia
il qual induiodato fra dun
latroni in croze pédisti e al
tarde pétendose li peccati
perdonasti cù alta vocelam
ma tuis i le mani del tuo pa-
dre recóminadasti io ti pgo i
lora extrema nò mabantó
nar mi fa che deli peccati
nici per vtra penitècia per
donati a ti cridar possa i le
mani tue o signor aricon-
nimento d spirito mio amic

O dio te salvi o faza td nro
stro redtore i laqual ríspia
do la belleza td diuino spi-
andore i posta al pámcello
bianco como nuc data a
santa heronica i segno da
mordio te salvi obalce
td mudo specchio te li santi
laqual vceder desiderano li
spiriti celesti purga nni da
ogni maci viciosa e achòa
cosongi nni al cosortio de
liberati nni a la patria ofcli-
ce figura a veder la faza.
te xpocu mente pura amic

Two pages (reduced) of the Italian edition of the
“Sufferings of Christ”

similar in some respects to that used by Albrecht Pfister at Bamberg, but beyond question a quite distinct font. Haebler has now shown that it is the same type—and in the same state—as was used in a broadside calendar for the year 1462, calculated for the meridian of Vienna. This calendar was undoubtedly printed either at the end of 1461 or in the early months of 1462, and this information supplies an approximate dating for the Munich copy of the "Sufferings of Christ."

The engraving of the Judgment Day which is found, printed from the same plate, in both the German and the Italian editions, appears, from the degree of clearness of the print, to have been used for the Italian printing slightly later than for the German. There is between the copies, however, no consequential difference in the condition of the plate. The white nail-holes in the Italian printing also show in the Munich copy, though they are obscured to some extent by the hand coloring of the plate.

There is one more clue, however, to comparative dating. In the Italian printing of the plate there shows, in one of the gravestones in the left foreground, a small nail-hole around which the plate could not make a clear impression. In the Munich copy the plate at this point prints perfectly, and this would lead to the conclusion that the Italian impression is the later one of the two printings.

The printer, according to Haebler, must have had a comparatively modest equipment, yet the fact that he evidently endeavored to observe the Gutenberg rules

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regarding connecting letters, which were so soon abandoned by printers, is certain proof that he was a technician of the very earliest period. This conclusion is confirmed by his typesetting practice. The line endings in the fragments are irregular, yet there was a manifest effort at line justification. He did not divide syllables at the end of a line.

His only device to make for even line endings was the period, and this he made use of arbitrarily. This point was never used to close a sentence in the middle of a line, and even at the end of the pages which end an individual prayer it is not correctly used. He did use the period to fill up space, sometimes setting it double for this purpose, one time high and one time low—and even in two places in the middle of a word, that is, "am.e.n," and he did not hesitate to put the point between two words closely related. The period in his hands has no value whatever as punctuation.

When, where, and by whom were these fragments printed? As to place of publication, the characteristics of the language of the text will afford the best guide. The fragments were examined from the philological viewpoint for Dr. Haebler by Prof. K. Vossler, of Munich, who concluded, on the basis of the dialect used, that the locale was North Italy, not Venice, and very probably in the neighborhood of Bologna or Piacenza.

As to date, we have found that the one complete illustration was undoubtedly printed after the Munich copy, which has been dated around 1462. Because of the similarity in condition of the plate, it is thought to be soon

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after—perhaps still in the year 1462, as the printer undertook his migration into Italy—an expedition which did not, apparently, have successful results. The probability of an early date is further attested by the typesetting practices already discussed.

Haebler thus expresses his conclusion: "I am convinced that the Italian edition of the 'Sufferings of Christ' appeared not long after 1462. It is clearly earlier than the printing at Subiaco, and undoubtedly the earliest printing in the Italian language, as well as the earliest example of printing done on Italian soil."